

The Bird Collection in the Museum and Institute of Zoology (Polish Academy of Sciences)

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Abstract. In Poland the biggest and oldest collection of birds belongs to the Museum and Institute of Zoology (Polish Academy of Sciences) in Warsaw. The beginning of this collection stretches down to 1819 – the year in which a collection of approx 20,000 specimens was obtained. The collection was enriched with gifts, purchases and by scientific expeditions. It was decimated by two world wars, plunders and fire, but part of this ancient collection is still available for research. In 1953 the Museum, transformed into the Museum and Institute of Zoology, was incorporated into the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Nowadays the Warsaw bird collection holds approx 4,000 species belonging to almost all known orders and families from all continents. The majority of them has detailed label information and is catalogued. Over 42,000 of the deposited bird specimens were collected between 1813 and 1970.

Key words. bird collection, birds of South America, birds of Siberia, Museum and Institute of Zoology, Warsaw

The animal collections gathered and stored in numerous museums all over the world represent an invaluable material for comparative (e.g. STEPANYAN 1995, WHITE et al. 1995), evolutionary (e.g. KIRBY 1980, SIMPSON & CRACRAFT 1981, SWIERCZEWSKI & RAIKOW 1981), ecological (e.g. CARLSON 1998) as well as genetic (e.g. PÄÄBO et al. 1988, CHATIGNY 2000, IUDICA et al. 2001) studies. The results obtained can be used for bird or even habitat protection and for the assessment of changes in biodiversity.

In Poland the largest and oldest collection of birds is that of the Museum and Institute of Zoology (Polish Academy of Sciences) in Warsaw. The beginning of this collection goes back to 1819 – the year in which a collection of approx 20,000 bird specimens completed by Sylvius MINCKWITZ was acquired by the Zoological Cabinet of the Royal University of Warsaw. The collection was especially valuable and contained several types and many voucher specimens of birds species recorded in Silesia for the first time. In 1887, a private Zoological Museum was created by the BRANICKI family. The BRANICKI brothers sponsored scientific expeditions to the Ussuri Territory in 1883-1885, to Korea and Japan (1885-1887) and to Peru (1881-1902). Both collections were united in 1918 into the National Museum of Natural History, Section of Zoology, renamed State Zoological Museum in 1928. The collection was enriched with gifts, purchases and by scientific expeditions. It was decimated by two world wars, plundering and fire, but part of this ancient collection is still available for research. In 1953, the museum was transformed into the Museum & Institute of Zoology and was incorporated into the Polish Academy of Sciences. More information about the history of the museum and its

collection is available elsewhere (e.g. KAZUBSKI 1996).

According to the labels, the approx 4,000 species of the Warsaw collection represent almost all known orders and nearly all families according to SIBLEY & AHLQUIST (1990) and all continents (Table 1). The majority of the > 42,000 specimen in the collection is labelled in detail and catalogued. They were collected between 1813 and 1970 (Table 2). Before 1939 there were 427 holotypes of species and subspecies in the collection (SZTOLCMAN & DOMANIEWSKI 1927).

Table 1: Geographic origin of the specimens in the bird collection in the Museum and Institute of Zoology.

Area	%
Europe	40.62
Africa	3.45
South America	25.41
North and Central America	1.94
Australia	1.93
Asia	17.80
Arctic and Antarctic	0.07
no information	8.78

Table 2: Temporal distribution of the collected specimens.

Period	%
19th century	28.70
1901-1913	2.76
1914-1939	34.65
1939-1970	3.23
no information	30.66

About one third of the specimens in the museum was obtained in the 19th century. Among these specimens from Asia (Siberia, Near and Far East, and Caucasus), Africa and South America prevail. During that time numerous expeditions were undertaken by well known Polish zoologists like Benedykt DYBOWSKI, Tomasz BAREY, Mikołaj PRZEWALSKI, Ludwik MŁOKOSIEWICZ, Micha JANKOWSKI, Jan KALINOWSKI, Konstanty JELSKI, Jan SZTOLCMAN and many others who enriched the bird collection of the museum with valuable specimens. These collections formed the basis for numerous scientific publications by many native and foreign scientists (e.g. TACZANOWSKI 1877, BERLEPSCH & SZTOLCMAN 1892, 1894, 1901). Birds from Peru were studied by Władysław TACZANOWSKI, and his „Ornithologie du Perou“ (1884-1886) was the first bird monograph of South America.

After the First World War the collection was enlarged with birds from Europe and South America (Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Brazil). Expeditions to Central and South America were organized mainly by Tadeusz CHROSTOWSKI, Tadeusz JACZEWSKI and Arkady FIEDLER. The European specimens came not only from the territory of Poland but also from Ukraine, the European part of Russia, Balkan Peninsula and western Europe. In this period, zoological expeditions to Egypt and Madagascar (1930-1931) were organized as well as three cruises of „Dar Pomorza“ in the Atlantic Ocean (1931-1932, 1933-1934, 1938).

Collecting was much less intensive in the period after World War II. And above all, a significant part of the specimens in this period was insufficiently labelled – the date as well as the location are in many cases not noted. Most of the collections deported by the German occupants were returned to the museum subsequently. The museum was also enriched by collections of former German institutions in Poland and by private collections. Among them were for instance a collection of the natural History Museum in Szczecin or the collection of Hummingbirds of the Museum in Cieplice.

The greater part of the bird collection in the Museum and Institute of Zoology is catalogued and available as database. The biggest problem in cataloguing of the

old specimen is the archaic nomenclature used by former zoologists.

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Main Ornithological Collections in Southern Poland

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Abstract. The main collections of avian skins and mounted specimens in Poland result largely from the collecting activity carried out by German and Polish professionals as well as amateurs in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. At present considerable material has been accumulated in the southern Poland cities of Krakow, Bytom (Upper Silesia) and Wrocław. All collections housed in Poland suffered extensive loss and damage during World War II. Only a few new skins or mounted specimens are nowadays added to our collections yearly. The ones acquired are usually traffic kills, or they come from zoological gardens (rare species).

Key words. ornithological collections, Poland, Krakow, Bytom, Wrocław

1. INTRODUCTION

The main collections of avian skins and mounted specimens in Poland largely result from the collecting activity carried out by German and Polish professionals as well as amateurs in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. At present, besides the largest Polish collection deposited in Warsaw (see a separate paper by REJT & MAZGAJSKI), considerable material has been accumulated in the southern Poland cities of Krakow, Bytom (Upper Silesia) and Wrocław. All collections housed in Poland suffered extensive loss and damage during World War II. Now they are preserved in a few museums which, however, owing to a recent lack of understanding, as a rule do not significantly increase their volume. Several factors contribute to the recent decline in museological activity. Among them the following ones can be listed:

- a) lack of understanding among the decision-makers in biology, who often consider traditional taxonomy and physiography as „old-fashioned“ disciplines,
- b) lack of interest among young researchers and students,
- c) shortage of finances,
- d) shortage of space for housing the remains of bigger animals,
- e) lack of taxidermists, due to very low wages paid to auxiliary staff,
- f) negative ideological pressure of animal-rights organizations, opposing any collecting of animal specimens.

For the last 20 years, a taxidermist for vertebrates was employed only at the regional museum of Bytom; elsewhere the skills of this profession are largely forgotten. Consequently, only a few new skins or mounted specimens are nowadays added to our collections yearly. The ones acquired are usually

traffic kills, or they come from zoological gardens (rare species).

The remaining smaller collections (in Jelenia Góra near the Sudety mountains, in Częstochowa, in the University of Krakow and at Białowieża in NE Poland) hold several hundred or fewer skins and mounts each, usually exclusively of regional or national origin, often unlabelled.

Against such a background, the „living“ skeleton collection established in Krakow at the Institute of Systematics and Evolution of Animals, Polish Academy of Sciences, by Prof. Z. BOCHEŃSKI and his co-workers, and strongly developed during post-war time, is exceptional.

2. THE COLLECTION OF THE INSTITUTE OF SYSTEMATICS AND EVOLUTION OF ANIMALS (Polish Academy of Sciences) IN KRAKOW

This, one of the largest zoological collections in Poland, is moderately rich in ornithological specimens, such as skins and eggs. Its main part consists of a large (>3,000 specimens in 1,033 species) skeleton collection established and developed after World War

Table 1: The size of Polish ornithological collections

	Skins and mounts No of species		Eggs	Nests	Skeletons and skulls
Warszawa	c. 42,000	c. 3,000	6,600	—	—
Kraków	1,400	c. 250	2,309	274	c. 3,000
Bytom	1,700	c. 500	3,821	234	140
Wrocław	12,500	c. 2,460	11,260	200	c. 200
Cieplíce	922	370	541	30	—
Częstochowa	135	119	567	—	—
Białowieża	946	c. 130	335	—	—
Totals	c. 59,600		25,433	738	c. 3,340